

# Three records of Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria* in The Gambia

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**Trois mentions du Chevalier solitaire *Tringa solitaria* pour la Gambie.** Trois observations du Chevalier solitaire *Tringa solitaria* en Gambie sont présentées. Les observations ont été faites en janvier 1999, le 9 janvier 2005 et le 15 Septembre 2007. Auparavant il n'y avait qu'une seule mention documentée de cette espèce néarctique pour l'Afrique continentale, de Zambie, en janvier–février 1994. Il y a par ailleurs deux mentions pour les Îles du Cap Vert, en mars 1997 et décembre 2004–janvier 2005, et une pour les Îles Canaries, en mars 2004.

There is just one well-substantiated record of Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria*, a Nearctic species, for mainland Africa, from Zambia, in January–February 1994 (Aspinwall *et al.* 1995), with another published subsequently without details from The Gambia, in January 1999 (Borrow & Demey 2001). Three others, from Angola, South Africa and Central African Republic, are all presently deemed unsatisfactory (Dowsett & Forbes-Watson 1993, Aspinwall *et al.* 1995). In addition, there are two records for the Cape Verde Islands, on Boavista, in March 1997 (Hazevoet 1998), and São Vicente, in December 2004 to January 2005, and one from the Canary Islands, in March 2004 (Clarke 2006). Solitary Sandpiper was not mentioned in the 1999 reprint of the Gambian field guide (Barlow *et al.* 1997). Presented here are three records for The Gambia, including further details of the 1999 record cited above. Two are supported by photographs, and the third only with field notes. Solitary Sandpiper breeds over Canada and much of Alaska, with most of the population wintering in the West Indies and through Middle America south to Argentina and Uruguay (Alström *et al.* 1991). It is an accidental visitor to Western Europe, principally in autumn, with 32 records prior to 2008 from the UK (Hudson & the Rarities Committee

2008), and other scattered records from Iceland to Spain.

## Identification

Solitary Sandpiper is most likely to be confused with Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*, which is a common visitor to The Gambia between October and March with records in all months of the year (Barlow *et al.* 1999). The on average marginally smaller Solitary Sandpiper has a pattern most closely resembling Green Sandpiper and a structure most like Wood Sandpiper *T. glareola*, which is, on average, the smallest species of the three. Solitary Sandpiper is dark brown above, heavily spotted buffy white, with white underparts, although the lower throat, breast and flanks are

**Figure 1.** Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria*, Kotu Sewage Farm, The Gambia, January 1999 (Erik Sanders)

Chevalier solitaire *Tringa solitaria*, Kotu Sewage Farm, Gambie, janvier 1999 (Erik Sanders)



**Figure 2.** Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria*, Abuko Nature Reserve, The Gambia, 9 January 2005 (Dick Forsman)

Chevalier solitaire *Tringa solitaria*, Réserve naturelle d'Abuko, Gambie, 9 janvier 2005 (Dick Forsman)

streaked blackish brown. Solitary Sandpiper has a more conspicuous, broader white orbital ring, creating the appearance of a larger eye. The legs are olive, and the wings project c.1–2 cm beyond the tail, producing a tapering effect, similar to that of Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*. Separation in flight is straightforward. Solitary Sandpiper has a dark rump, dark uppertail-coverts and dark central tail-feathers, whilst Green and Wood Sandpipers have clean, bright white rumps. When active, Solitary Sandpiper tips the tail upward and bobs in the manner of Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*. The call is a shrill double *peet-weet*, most frequently given when flushed. None of the Gambian birds was sound-recorded, or heard to call, but the Zambian individual was sound-recorded by R. Stjernstedt (Aspinwall *et al.* 1995).

### First record

In January 1999 (exact date now unknown), E. Sanders visited Kotu Sewage Farm, Kombo St Mary Division in coastal Gambia (13°28'N 16°43'W), which adjoins Kotu Stream (an *Avicenna* mangrove-fringed creek that empties into the Atlantic Ocean). This well-watched area has played host to a diversity of Palearctic waders, marsh terns, some waterfowl and a number of Afrotropical wetland species. The site comprises four settling ponds into which raw sewage is pumped most days by tankers. The edges are frequently vegetated with emergent and decaying plant life, and household rubbish accumulates there. The photograph taken by ES (Fig. 1) shows the bird foraging on this matted waste.

### Second record

On 9 January 2005 D. Forsman visited Abuko Nature Reserve (13°24'N 16°39'W) where he observed, photographed and video-taped a Solitary Sandpiper over a period of 20 minutes (Fig. 2).

### Third record

On 15 September 2007, K. Roy was watching birds along the beach south of Tanji Bird Reserve, a protected Important Bird Area (13°24'N 16°39'W) of 617 ha. Using a telescope, KR was reading the numbers on colour-ringed Kelp *Larus dominicanus* and Lesser Black-backed Gulls *L. fuscus* when he noticed a Green Sandpiper-like bird near the tideline, a habitat which immediately struck him

as unusual for *Tringa ochropus*. Although the bird was only observed for <10 seconds before it flew, as it did so he clearly saw that the tail had barred sides and a dark band over the centre of the rump and tail. On his return to Banjul, KR showed CRB his comprehensive field notes and a sketch of the bird in flight. The features he observed are consistent with Solitary Sandpiper and eliminate Green Sandpiper. KR is very familiar with Solitary Sandpiper from Grenada in the West Indies during his stay there in the 1990s. Most of his sightings there were made on beaches. Just prior to this observation there were exceptional storms off The Gambia coast.

### Acknowledgements

Dick Forsman, Erik Sanders and Kevin Roy kindly furnished photographs and field data that made this note possible. Pete Leonard drew my attention to the Zambian record.

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Received 29 November 2008; revision accepted 29 April 2009.